

WHY DO WE NEED A TRANSITION PLAN?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates a public education for all eligible children ages 3 through 21 (in most states), and makes the schools responsible for providing the supports and services that will allow this to happen. It is important to recognize that one of the goals of IDEA is for students to be prepared for employment and independent living. As you may know, IDEA requirements are facilitated through the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. The IEP process must include transition planning services for all special education students at age 16. Ideally, this process should begin at age 14. The funding and the services available through IDEA are not available once the student has received a high school diploma, or aged out of the school system.



Transition Planning and the Individual Education Program

Transition services as outlined in **§300.43 of IDEA**

- (a) Transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that...
 - (1) Is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;
 - (2) Is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and includes:
 - i. Instruction
 - ii. Related services
 - iii. Community experiences
 - iv. The development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives
 - v. If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation.
- (b) Transition services for children with disabilities may be special education, if provided as specially designed instruction, or a related service, if required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education

<http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cdynamic%2CTopicalBrief%2C17%2C>



It is important be mindful that the transition process must include goals that are:

- Outcome-oriented
- Based upon the student's strengths and areas of need
- Focused on instruction and services for education, employment, and other living skills.

This is a process that will continue to evolve. The transition plan is **a work in progress** that should be monitored several times per year. You and your adolescent with autism will continue to learn and grow during this process, and you will need to adjust your plan accordingly. By beginning early and working collaboratively with your school district, outside agencies and others in your community, you will be able to make the best possible use of educational entitlements afforded to your child with autism before he or she enters adulthood.

What Are My Child's Rights and How Do They Change When He Leaves the Educational System?

As mentioned previously, IDEA provides federal funding to state and local school districts to provide special education services to eligible students with disabilities. Under IDEA, your child is eligible for special education services from ages 3 through 21 (in most states). This act ensures that schools seek out students with disabilities, and that services are provided based upon the student's strengths, challenges, and interests. An IEP facilitates this process.

Under IDEA, there must be a transition plan in place for all students by the age of 16 (ages vary by state). Just as with other educational services in a student's IEP, the school district must provide the transition services necessary for the student to achieve the transition goals stated in the IEP.

Once the child leaves the school system, the educational entitlements of IDEA are no longer in place. There are some laws listed below that will provide some services after your young adult leaves the educational system:

The Rehabilitation Act is the federal legislation that authorizes the formula grant programs of vocational rehabilitation, supported employment, independent living, and client assistance. It also authorizes a variety of training and service discretionary grants administered by the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

The Rehabilitation Act authorizes research activities that are administered by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, and the work of the National Council on Disability. The Act also includes a variety of provisions focused on rights, advocacy and protections for individuals with disabilities.

More specifically, Section 504 of this act is a civil rights law that protects people with disabilities from discrimination concerning services, employment, and public



accommodations. Section 504 applies to any institution that receives federal funds such as schools, public colleges, hospitals, non-profit agencies, and public housing. www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/reg/narrative.html

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, and mandates that these individuals have the right to public accommodations, as well as access to programs of public agencies. The ADA protects against discrimination only if the person with a disability could participate in the program or perform the job with “reasonable accommodations”. Without the accommodations, the individual must be “otherwise qualified”.

It is important to note that after high school, the accommodations accessed through ADA or Section 504 are not provided automatically, but they must be requested by you or your young adult with autism. www.ada.gov/pubs/ada.htm

Different Types of Diplomas

It is very important to understand the different types of diplomas available to individuals with disabilities in the public school system. Some learners with autism will be able to receive a general high school diploma, while others may work toward an IEP or Occupational Diploma. The following list outlines some of the different types of diplomas, and what opportunities they may provide for post-secondary education. Each state has different options and guidelines for diplomas. For the diploma options in your state, please refer to the Autism Speaks Resource Guide.

High School Diploma – This diploma is awarded to students who have passed required courses and exams in a number of subjects. The diploma is generally accepted for admission everywhere: 2 and 4 year colleges as well as military and trade schools.

General Education Development (GED) Diplomas – This diploma is awarded to students who have passed the GED exam. The GED is generally accepted by military, trade schools, and some junior/community colleges (which sometimes require additional qualifications).

IEP/ Local Diplomas or Certificates of Completion – This diploma is awarded to students who have reached the goals on their Individualized Education Programs. The IEP qualification is not recognized as a diploma by 2 and 4 year colleges, the majority of companies, or the military. It is not accepted for admission to any post-secondary degree program without other testing or certification.

You may also want to confirm the date of your child’s graduation. Federal law states that your child’s eligibility for special education ends when he graduates from high school with a diploma, or until the child ages out of educational entitlements (this varies by state – see your state’s timeline in the Autism Speaks Resource Guide: AutismSpeaks.org/community/fsdb/search.php).



Getting Started

In preparation for the Transition IEP Meeting

As far in advance of the first meeting as possible, you should talk with your adolescent with autism about what he or she may want to do in the future. While out in the community, you can identify different jobs that may be of interest to him or her. You may also want to point out older siblings or other young adults in your family or neighborhood that are going off to college, getting a job, or living on their own. It is important to remember that this may seem like a scary topic for adolescents with autism to discuss, and they may not be ready. Some families have shared that they have scheduled a specific day of the week and a specific time to discuss future plans with their young adult. Along with their adolescent, one family scheduled Sundays from 3:00 to 3:30 as their time to discuss employment, living arrangements, or community life. This helped provide structure and a time limit on a sensitive subject. It also provided some time for the young adult to prepare for what he or she was going to share during these sessions.


If you have completed a person centered plan, or if you would like to implement a person centered approach, the best time to do this is before the Transition IEP meeting. The information generated from the person centered planning should be shared with the Transition IEP team in advance of the meeting.

There are also several tools available that can help you and your adolescent to prepare for the transition IEP meeting. Two such tools are listed below and are available online:

1. *It's My Choice*, The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities Transition workbook, has some specific tools that may help your young adult with autism to prepare for a transition IEP meeting. The list is included in the online appendix of this kit. www.mnddc.org/extra/publications/choice/Its_My_Choice.pdf
2. Another tool that may be helpful to you and your young adult is Chapter 3 of *Keeping it Real* on The Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities website. This chapter specifically outlines information about the transition process, supports, and IEP meetings. Also included are activities to help your young adult focus on these topics. rwjms.umdj.edu/boggscenter/projects/keep_real_more.html



Assessments

 In preparation for the transition meeting, your school district may also conduct several assessments that should be shared with you and your adolescent in advance of the meeting. Some of the assessments are outlined below:

Level I Assessment

- The parents, student and teachers all complete a questionnaire to help them focus on the student's long term career goals.
- This assessment helps to explore possible areas of interest that can be used in the transition plan.
- Level I assessments should be updated yearly.

Level II Assessments

- Provide feedback as to a student's skills and aptitudes when compared to his or her peers.
- The Level II Assessments can often help pinpoint areas where further skills can be developed.

Level III Assessments

- This assessment is for students who do not perform well on tests or thrive in testing environments.
- This is a situational assessment. The student tries out different areas of work in different settings with the proper supports in place.
- Level III assessments allow for the student to get some hands on work experience and to see what they enjoy and in what fields they excel.
- The staff on hand will assess the student's response to each environment.

Preparing Your Adolescent for the Transition Meeting

An excellent way to develop self-advocacy skills is to make sure that your adolescent with autism is involved in the IEP process.

"The beauty of using the IEP as a tool for building skills in self-advocacy and disclosure is that it already exists. Presently, the IEP involves different professionals and parents meeting to create a customized education for the child."

- Stephen Shore

Ask and Tell: Self-Advocacy and Disclosure for People on the Autism Spectrum, p. 76.

It is important that your adolescent with autism knows about his or her disability, and can communicate to others the nature of the disability and the accommodations that he or she may need as a result. Once young adults with autism leave the educational system, they will need to be able to do this on their own to the best of their ability. Parents know that advocacy skills can take years to develop. It is therefore very important that the student can begin to develop these skills as soon as possible.



Below is a list of questions and topics that you might review with your adolescent with autism prior to the transition meeting:

1. What is a disability?
2. Do you have a disability?
3. What is the name of the law that allows you to receive special services from the school?
4. What is an accommodation?
5. Do you have any accommodations in your classes?
6. What's an IEP?
7. Do you have an IEP?

For those adolescents with limited verbal ability, pictures or written statements may be helpful. See the online appendix of this kit for examples.

Options for Student Participation during the IEP Process

From *Ask and Tell: Self-Advocacy and Disclosure for People on the Autism Spectrum* by Stephen Shore (p. 84 – 86)

“Just as when transitioning to any other new activity, prepare the student in advance of the IEP meeting and describe its purpose. Student involvement can take place on a sliding scale of responsibility. Initially, and/or for students at a lower cognitive or developmental stage, having students just be familiar with the purpose of an IEP can be sufficient and all that can reasonably be expected. The range of involvement might include the following:

- The teacher brings the student to the IEP meeting for a brief period of time, encouraging interactions with some or all the team members. This introduction may be as short as a few minutes where the student just says “hi” to one or two IEP team members, or helps pass out materials.
- The student prepares a short statement that he or she distributes or reads aloud to the IEP team indicating strengths and difficulties in school.
- After obtaining data from IEP team members prior to the meeting, the student writes sections of the IEP for modification and approval at the IEP meeting.
- The student co-presents as an equal member of the IEP team.
- The student leads the IEP meeting with support from his or her primary teacher.”

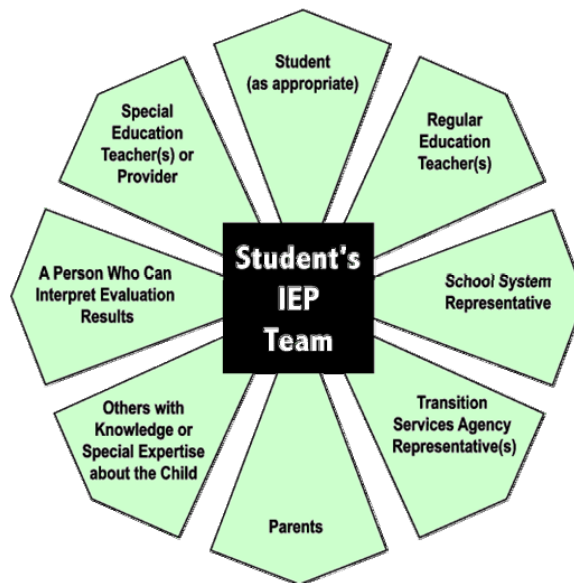
Just as with every other subject, it is important to develop a lesson plan and anticipate questions and concerns that students may have as they work on applying their strengths and challenges to create their own customized education.



Nicholas was worried about his transition team meeting. He asked Mr. Newberg, his special education teacher, repeated questions about the meeting. He was so afraid of making a mistake or saying the wrong thing. Mr. Newberg suggested that they spend some time talking about the transition team meeting. Mr. Newberg spoke with Nicholas and provided a visual schedule of what would happen during the transition meeting. In addition Mr. Newberg and Nicholas then decided to develop a video of Nicholas talking about what he would like to include in his transition plan. Mr. Newberg let the transition team know that a video clip from Nicholas would be played during the meeting.

Nicholas's IEP meeting was a great success, because he felt represented by the video tape that he had made. Once the video was played, Nicholas was able to relax at the meeting and even answer questions about his disability.

Who is involved in the Transition Planning Process?



- The student (as appropriate)
- The student's parents or guardians
- Teachers (Special and General Education)
- School Administrators
- Related service providers such as speech therapists, behavioral consultants, etc.
- Representatives of outside agencies that may provide support to reach post-transition goals, such as the state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Other individuals that can support the student



From: A Guide to the Individualized Education Program Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services U.S. Department of Education.
<http://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/iepguide.pdf>

Since your school district is responsible for coordinating transition services for your adolescent with autism, you may want to partner with the school district in advance of the transition planning meeting to make sure that any outside agencies or individuals that can offer resources have been invited to the meeting. As you can imagine, it takes a fair amount of time to coordinate with all of those that may need to attend the transition meeting. The outside agencies may serve many schools in your area, so you may want to work with your school advisors to start the process as early as possible.

How Do You Create and Implement a Transition Plan?

The Transition Meeting

You may feel overwhelmed sitting at a table with educators and professionals who are making recommendations about your adolescent's future. Your adolescent may feel the same apprehension. Remember, nothing is "written in stone", and the plan continues to be a work in progress. However, goals are set in order to move forward, and with a proper plan, your child will reach new vistas.

It is important to respect your adolescent's wishes and needs, and encourage others to do so as well. You should try to model appropriate behavior during the meeting by addressing questions about your child, to your child. Look at your child for a response, and encourage others to do the same. If your child is having trouble answering a question, provide visual supports or choices to further encourage the adolescent to be an active participant in the meeting.

Many parents want to highlight their child's successes, while downplaying struggles. It is important that skills be developed so that they can be completed independently. There are times when parents will believe that their adolescent has mastered a skill even though the skills may not be done completely independently. In doing so, you are doing a disservice to your adolescent. A mastered skill needs to be done correctly from beginning to end, without prompts or support. This is an important point to keep in mind as you develop IEP goals.

During the transition meeting the transition team should consider the following areas as they relate to the adolescent with autism:

- community participation
- adult services
- integrated employment (including supported employment),
- post-secondary education
- vocational education
- integrated employment (including supported employment)
- continuing and adult education
- independent living



Helpful Guidance

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) provides excellent resources for families going through the transition process. They provide the following guidance:

Remember that IDEA's definition of transition services states that these are a “coordinated set of activities” designed within a results-oriented process. Specific activities are also mentioned, which gives the IEP team insight into the range of activities to be considered in each of the domains above:

- Instruction
- Related services
- Community experiences
- The development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives
- If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation.

Confused by all these lists? Putting them together, what we have is this: The IEP team must discuss and decide whether the student needs transition services and activities (e.g., instruction, related services, community experiences, etc.) to prepare for the different domains of adulthood (post-secondary education, vocational education, employment, adult services, independent living, etc.) That's a lot of ground to cover!

But it's essential ground, if the student's transition to the adult world is to be facilitated and successful. A spectrum of adult activities is evident here, from community to employment, from taking care of oneself (e.g., daily living skills) to considering other adult objectives and undertakings.

From: www.nichcy.org/EducateChildren/transition_adulthood



Adolescents with autism and their transition team members may keep the following in mind:

- People learn things best in the places where they happen – like buying things at a store or shaving in the bathroom.
- People learn things best when they use the real item- like using real money when learning to count.
- People learn things best when they do them at the time they are usually done – like brushing teeth after a meal or before going to bed.
- People learn best from other people- like learning how to work in places where other people work.
- People learn best when the things that they learn are useful – like using the telephone or taking the bus or writing a check.
- It is important to think about things to learn that will help you become more independent where you live and work right now and where you will live and work in the future.

It's My Choice by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, p. 40
www.mnddc.org/extra/publications/choice/lts_My_Choice.pdf

General Steps for Creating a Transition Plan

Several steps have been outlined that will be important in developing a transition plan for your adolescent with autism. These should be a part of the transition plan:

- Describe the student's strengths and present levels of academic achievement and functional performance.
 - o Descriptions of the student's strengths and present levels of academic achievement and functional performance are frequently given at IEP meetings only by school personnel, such as general and special educators, speech and language therapists, and school psychologists. It is critical that students and parents be provided opportunities to participate in this step of the process, as well.
- Develop measurable postsecondary goals.
 - o The development of measurable annual goals should support the student's expressed post-school goals and should be based upon the student's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance and age-appropriate transition assessments.
- Develop corresponding IEP goals that will enable the student to meet their postsecondary goals.
- Describe the transition services needed.
 - o This portion of the IEP planning process identifies the transition instruction and services, activities, personnel, or resources that can be used to help the student achieve his or her desired post-school goals.

In addition to stating the goals for your adolescent, the transition plan should include logistical information on how the plan will be implemented and monitored, such as:

- A timeline for achieving goals
- Identified responsible people or agencies to help with these goals
- Clarification of how roles will be coordinated
- A plan for identifying post-graduation services and supports, and obtaining the necessary funding to access these services and supports



Examples of specific of Transition IEP goals in the areas of education/training, employment, and independent living can be found on the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) website:

www.nichcy.org/EducateChildren/transition_adulthood/pages/iep.aspx

“Once we started the transition process, I looked at Stacey’s education with a different focus. Although academics are important, I needed to work with her to make choices as to the best possible use of her high school time. Was it more important for her to identify the predicate of the sentence, or to respond when a peer spoke to her? My husband and I started to think about Stacey’s education by asking the question ‘is this a skill or information that she will use when she leaves school?’”

— Jeannette, Mom of Stacey, age 14

If a parent or caregiver is not in agreement with the transition services proposed, then he or she can try to reach an acceptable agreement with the school district. If this is not possible, then the family has the right to go to mediation or an impartial hearing.

Long-term transition planning is an ongoing process that reflects the continuing development and changing needs of your adolescent. Given that the process starts in the early to mid-teen years, there needs to be a great deal of flexibility in the plan. Your adolescent with autism will continue to grow and learn throughout his or her remaining school years and beyond, so the plan needs to be flexible and at times altered to meet his or her changing needs and goals.

“Once the actual plan is completed by the team, it is a living, evolving document that should be reviewed and updated several times a year to ensure it reflects and meets all of your young adult’s needs, and adequate progress is being made to that end. By creating a document with outcome-oriented goals that can be measured, you can more efficiently and effectively monitor your young adult’s progress.”

*–Life’s Journey Through Autism, A Guide for Transition to Adulthood
Organization for Autism Research, Southwest Autism Research and Resource
Center and Danya International, Inc.*



Transition and the IEP Process Resources

Transition Goals in the IEP

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY)
www.nichcy.org/EducateChildren/transition_adulthood/pages/iep.aspx

Keeping It Real: How to Get the Support You Need for the Life You Want, Keeping It Real Teacher's Module, and Keeping It Real Parent's Module

K. Roberson, R. Blumberg, D. Baker.
The Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities
rwjms.umdnj.edu/boggscenter/projects/keep_real_more.html

Training Modules for the Transition to Adult Living: An Information and Resource Guide

CalSTAT: Technical Assistance & Training
www.calstat.org/transitionGuide.html

Living with Autism: Preparing for a Lifetime

Autism Society
www.autism-society.org/site/DocServer/Transition-Preparing_for_a_Lifetime.pdf?docID=10622

It's My Choice

by William T. Allen, Ph.D.
Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities
www.mnddc.org/extra/publications/choice/Its_My_Choice.pdf

The Rehabilitation Act

www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/reg/narrative.html

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

idea.ed.gov

Americans with Disabilities Act

www.ada.gov



More General Resources

Guiding Your Teenager with Special Needs Through the Transition from School to Adult Life: Tools for Parents

by Mary Korpi

Life's Journey Through Autism: A Guide for Transition to Adulthood

Organization for Autism Research, Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center and Danya International, Inc.

www.researchautism.org/resources/reading/documents/transitionguide.pdf

Ask and Tell: Self-Advocacy and Disclosure for People on the Autism Spectrum

edited by Stephen M. Shore

